Chapter: The Exhausted Kirishima-kun

KIRISHIMA-KUN HAS BEEN EXHAUSTED.

ONE HE HAD NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE.

HE CANNOT EVEN RECALL THE LAST TIME HE FELT THIS TIRED. IT HAS BEEN LIKE A COMPLETELY NEW LEVEL OF EXHAUSTION...

IT HAS BEEN A MONTH SINCE THE KIRISHIMA FAMILY BECAME A FAMILY OF FOUR, WITH THE ADDITION OF JUN'S YOUNGER SISTER MIU.

ZZZ...

ZZZ...

SHIROU, AI, JUN... THEIR LIVES HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY CHANGED DRAMATICALLY SINCE THEN.
AMONG THE CHANGES, ONE STANDS OUT...
...I KNOW I SHOULDN'T BE THINKING ABOUT THIS, BUT...
I JUST CAN'T HELP IT, YOU KNOW...?
TRULY, IT'S JUST ONE OF THOSE HARMLESS THOUGHTS EVERYONE HAS. BUT SERIOUSLY...
WHY DID I FOOLISHLY DECIDE TO ADOPT THIS BABY...?
SO CUTE...
ZZZZ...
THIS KID IS EXTREMELY CUTE, BUT...

I DISCUSSED IT WITH MY WIFE BEFORE WE ADOPTED MIU. I WAS PREPARED FOR THIS.

I WAS PREPARED TO BE THE PRIMARY CAREGIVER IF WE DECIDED TO ADOPT HER. AFTER ALL, I'M A FULL-TIME HOUSEHUSBAND.

OR SO I BELIEVED, BUT...

I MEAN... I DID THINK IT WOULD BE A LOT OF TROUBLE, OKAY?

I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT LIFE WITH A BABY WOULD LEAVE ME WITH SO LITTLE TIME FOR MYSELF...

IT IS NOT THAT SHIROU WAS UNPREPARED TO WELCOME THE ARRIVAL OF THIS BABY.

I REALLY DO...!!!

ANYWAY, I WANT TO SLEEP FOR A VERY LONG TIME...!!

ANYWAY... ANYWAY...

LET'S JUST SAY IT'S A LITTLE BEYOND MY EXPECTA-TIONS...

SIIIIGH...

WOBBLE

EVEN SO, HE'S STILL LIKE THIS.

WOBBLE

HE THOUGHT HE HAD PREPARED AS WELL AS HE COULD.

HE TOOK ADVICE FROM MIDWIVES...

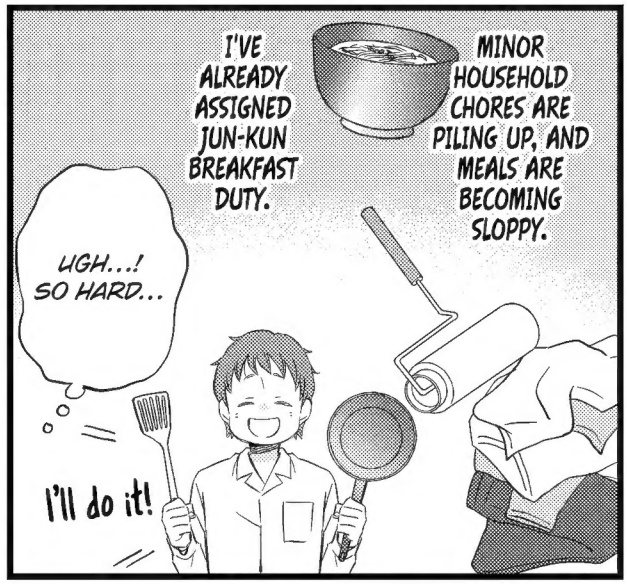
HE TOOK PART IN PARENTING CLASSES FOR FATHERS AND MOTHERS ORGANIZED BY THE MATERNITY AND GYNECOLOGY DEPARTMENT AT THE HOSPITAL WHERE AI WORKS.

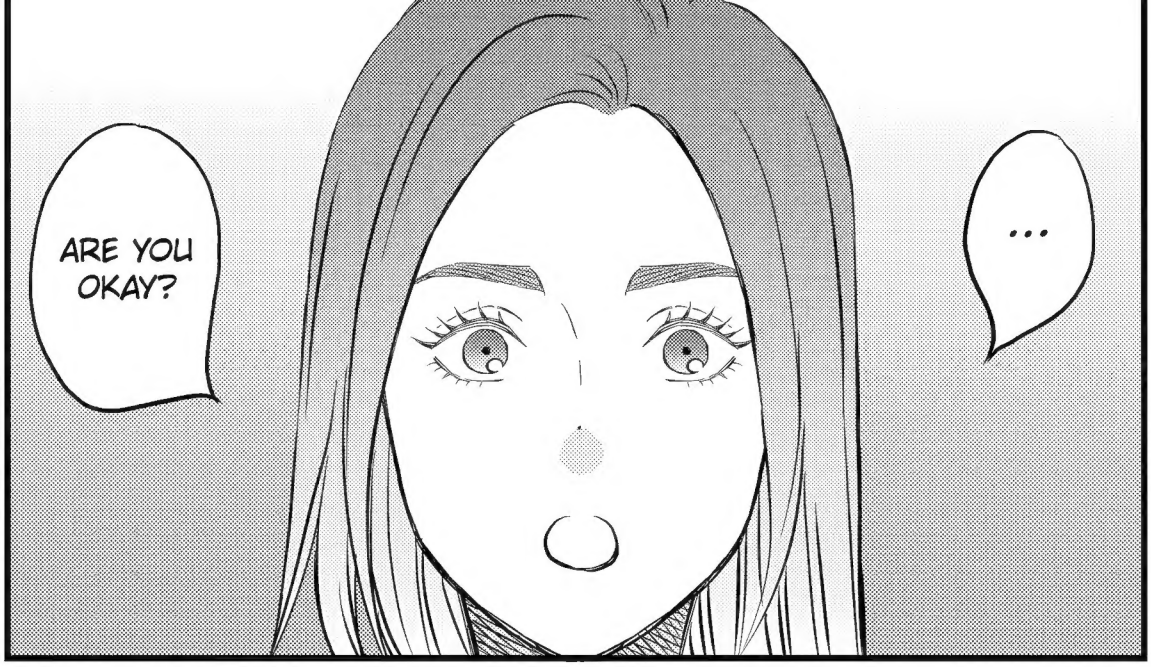
I READ HER PICTURE BOOKS, TAKE HER FOR WALKS...
THEY CAN'T SIT STILL FOR LONG, SO LEAVING THEM ALONE IS DANGEROUS.

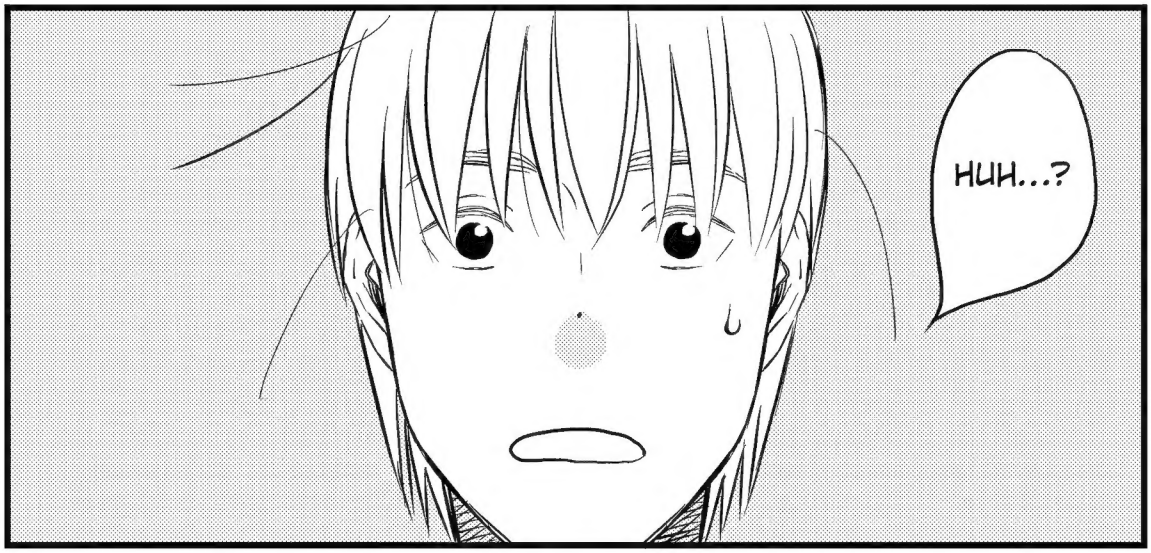
THEY'LL MOSTLY BEHAVE IF I SHOW THEM VIDEOS, BUT...
ANYWAY... CARING FOR BABIES IS ALL ABOUT KEEPING AN EYE ON THEM.

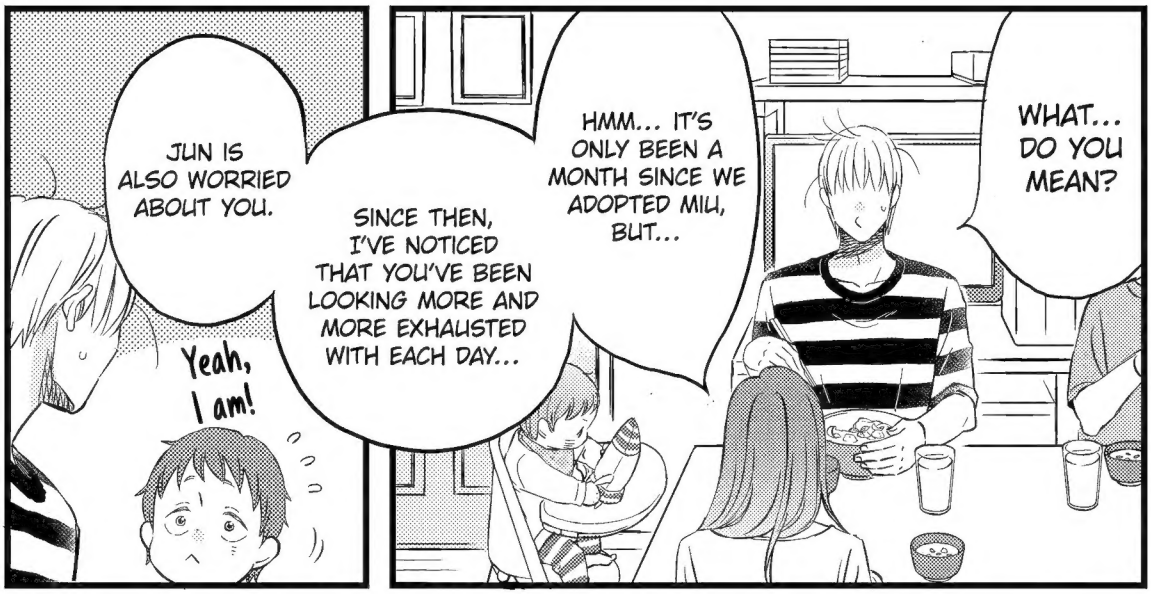
I'M IN A SITUATION WHERE I CAN'T DO ALL OF THE HOUSEWORK LIKE I USED TO.
THE NUMBER OF TASKS THAT MUST BE COMPLETED IN A SINGLE DAY INCREASED ALL AT ONCE.
I CHANGE HER DIAPERS, PREPARE MILK AND BABY FOOD, CHANGE HER CLOTHES, AND BATHE HER...

IT'S HARD, BUT... I CAN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT THIS...
IT'S MY JOB, SO I JUST HAVE TO KEEP AT IT...


I'VE ALREADY ASSIGNED JUN-KUN BREAKFAST DUTY.
MINOR HOUSEHOLD CHORES ARE PILING UP, AND MEALS ARE BECOMING SLOPPY.
UGH...! SO HARD...
I'll do it!


ARE YOU OKAY?
...


HUH...?


JUN IS ALSO WORRIED ABOUT YOU.
Yeah, I am!
SINCE THEN, I'VE NOTICED THAT YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING MORE AND MORE EXHAUSTED WITH EACH DAY...
HMM... IT'S ONLY BEEN A MONTH SINCE WE ADOPTED MIU, BUT...
WHAT... DO YOU MEAN?

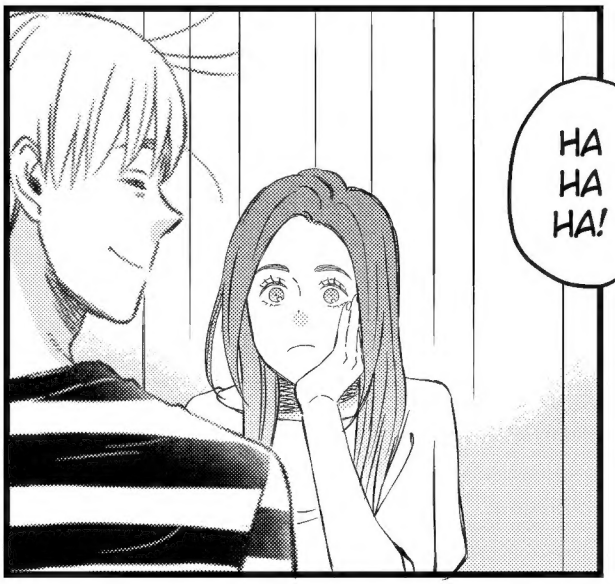
Nom Nom
I'M AFRAID THAT IF I COMPLAIN TOO MUCH ABOUT SOMETHING LIKE THIS, FULL-TIME HOUSEKEEPERS WITH CHILDREN WILL BE ANGRY AT ME.
OH, I'M FINE... I'M NOT USED TO CHILDREARING, SO IT'S A CHALLENGE. BUT...

YEAH.
YOU SURE?
YOU'RE ALREADY IN CHARGE OF BREAKFAST AND TAKING CARE OF MIU AFTER SHE COMES OUT OF THE BATH. YOU'RE HELPING ME A LOT ALREADY.

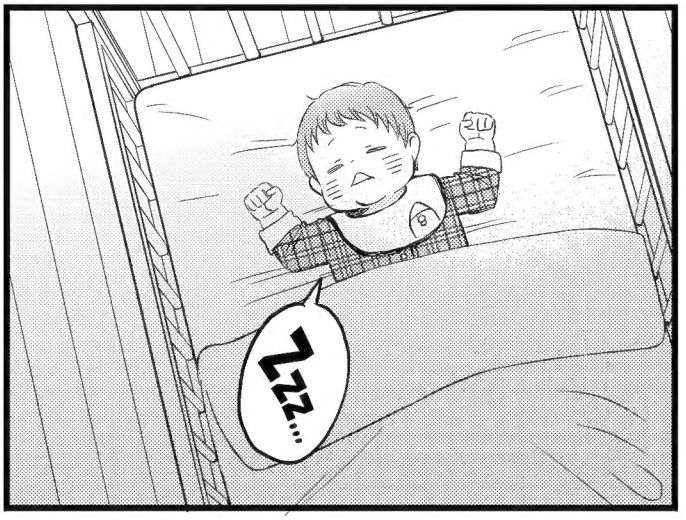
THANK YOU, JUN-KUN.
IF THERE'S ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO, JUST TELL ME.

IT'S FUN WHEN THE HOUSE IS LIVELY, HUH?
MIU IS EXCITED THAT EVERYONE IS TOGETHER.
HA HA HA!

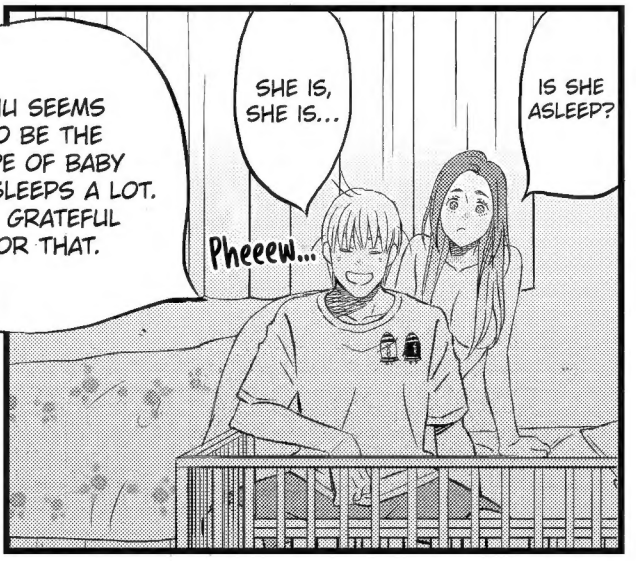
WHOA! WHAT'S WRONG? YOU'RE SUDDENLY MAKING A RACKET, MIU...
Clatter Clatter
AAA AHH!

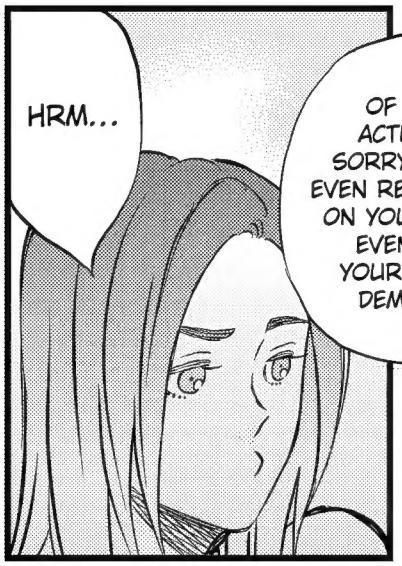

HA HA HA!

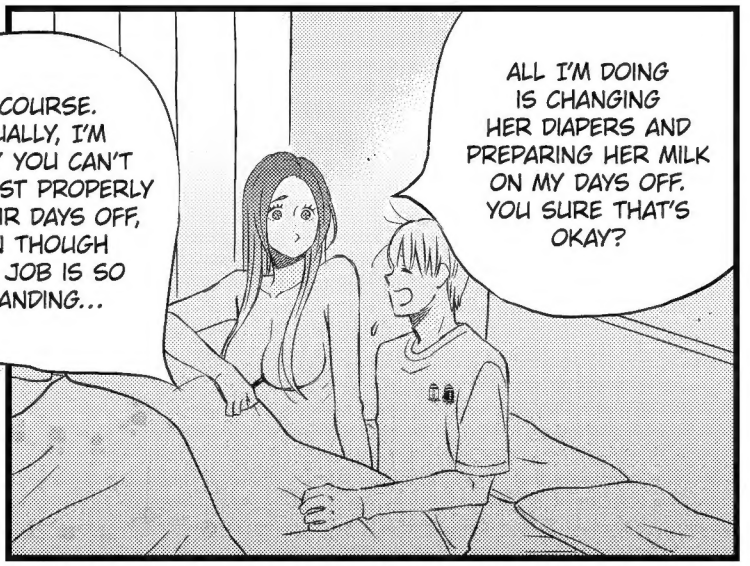
GYA AAH!
YEAH. I'M ALSO HAPPY WE'RE ALL TOGETHER!

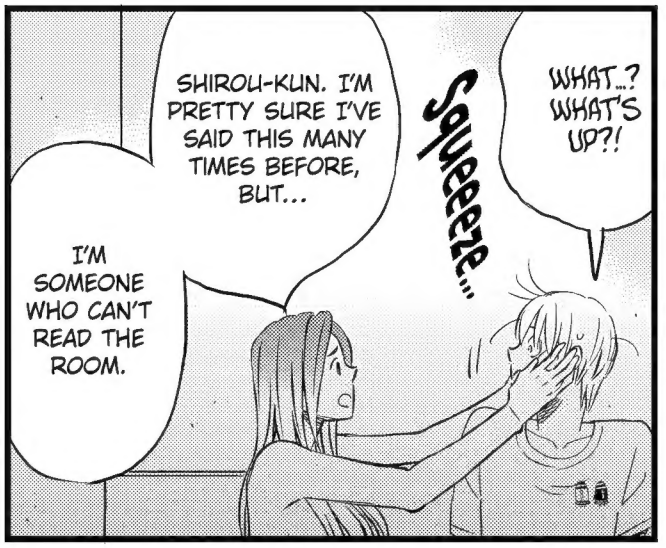

ZZZ...

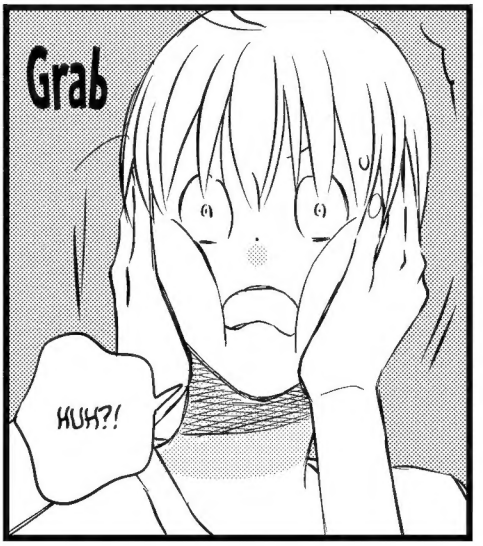
I'VE HEARD A LOT ABOUT HOW DIFFICULT IT IS BECAUSE BABIES CRY AT NIGHT...
BUT THAT HASN'T BEEN AN ISSUE SO FAR...


MIU SEEMS TO BE THE TYPE OF BABY WHO SLEEPS A LOT. I'M GRATEFUL FOR THAT.
SHE IS, SHE IS...
IS SHE ASLEEP?
Pheeew...

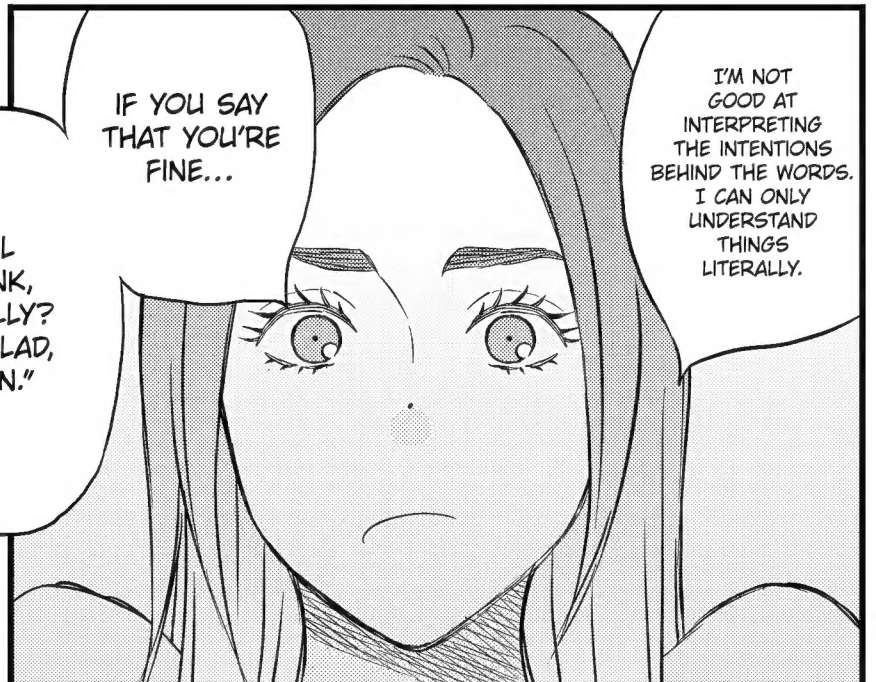

HRM...


OF COURSE. ACTUALLY, I'M SORRY YOU CAN'T EVEN REST PROPERLY ON YOUR DAYS OFF, EVEN THOUGH YOUR JOB IS SO DEMANDING...
ALL I'M DOING IS CHANGING HER DIAPERS AND PREPARING HER MILK ON MY DAYS OFF. YOU SURE THAT'S OKAY?

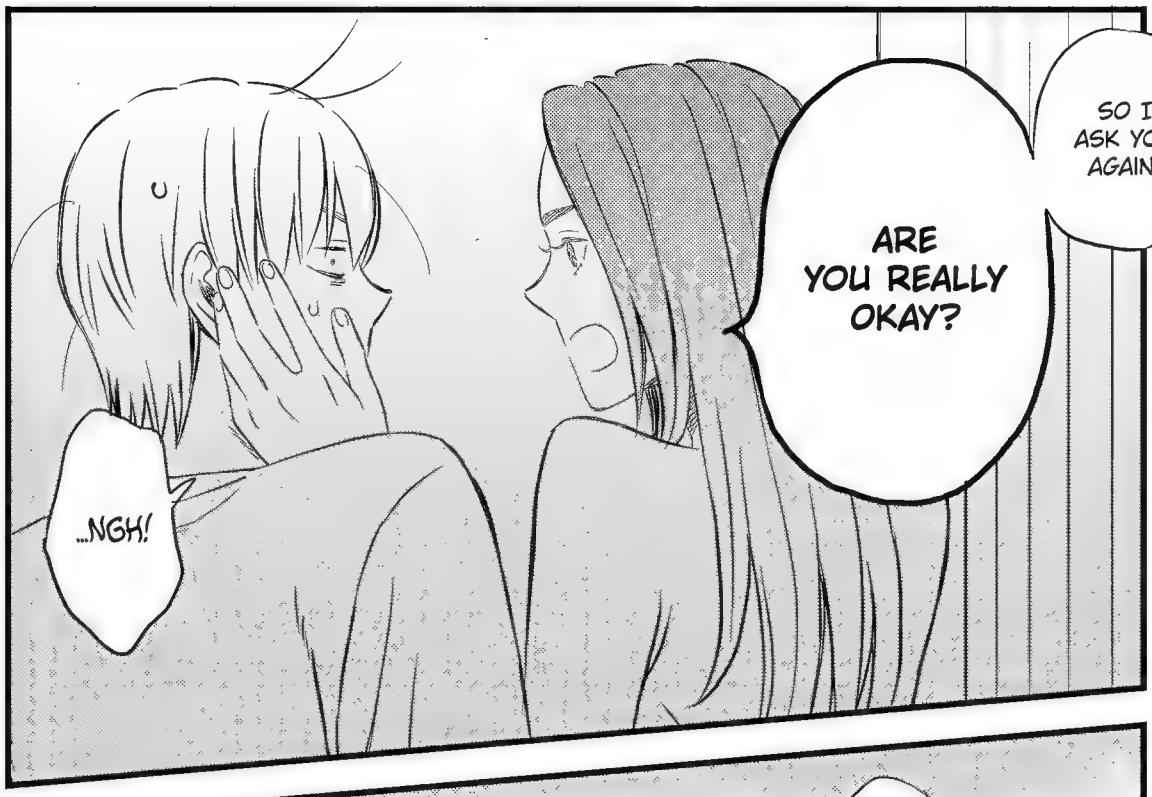

SHIROU-KUN. I'M PRETTY SURE I'VE SAID THIS MANY TIMES BEFORE, BUT...
I'M SOMEONE WHO CAN'T READ THE ROOM.
Squeeeze...
WHAT...? WHAT'S UP?!

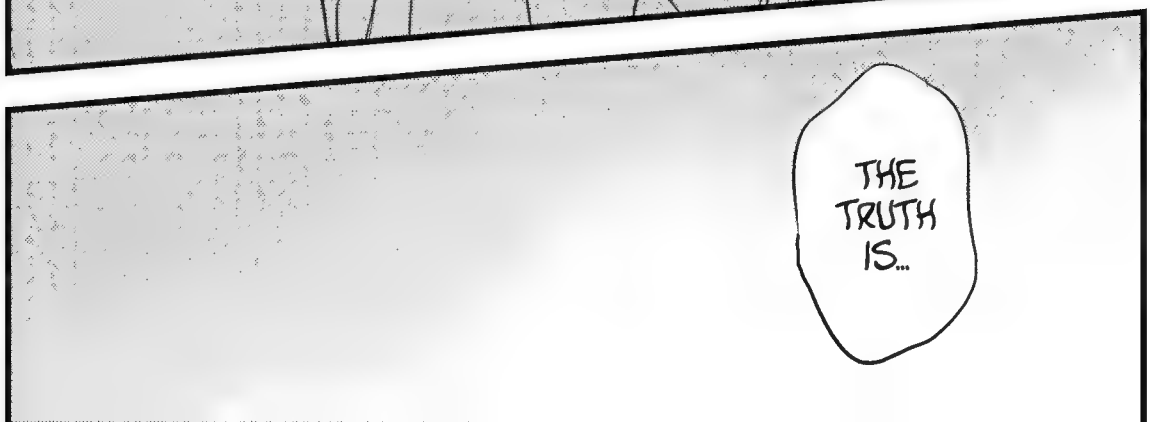

Grab
HUH?!

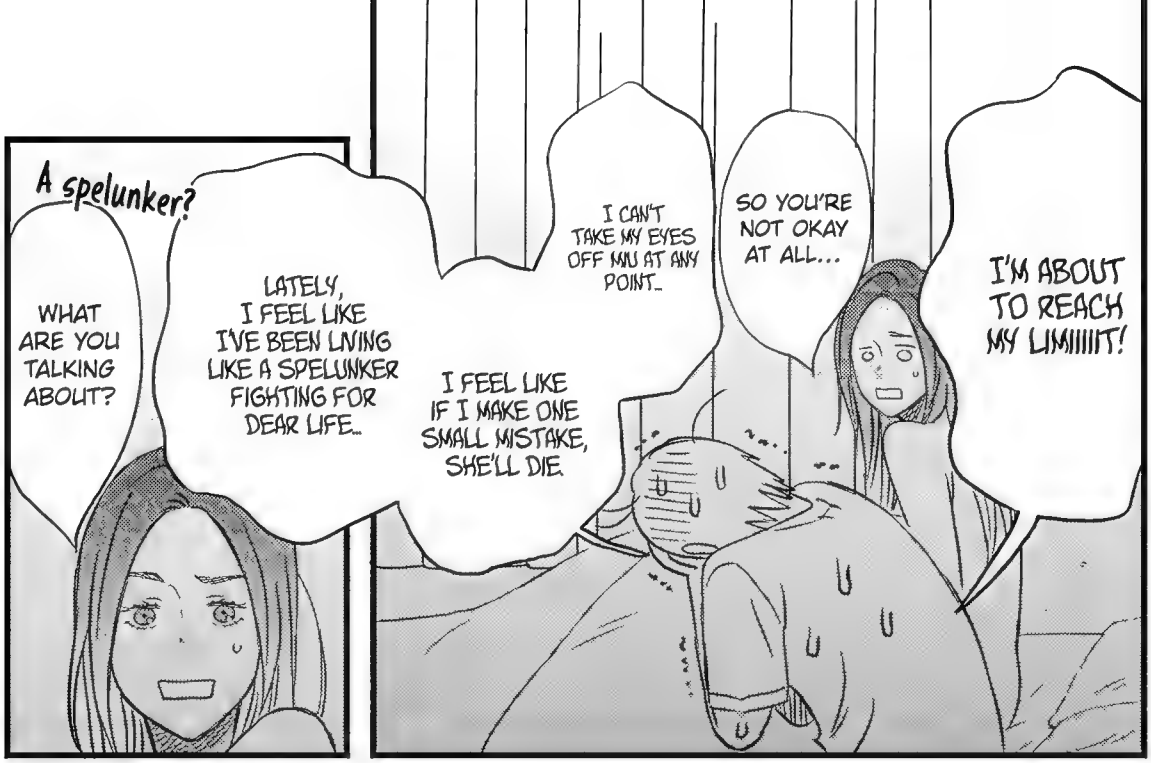
THAT'S WHY...

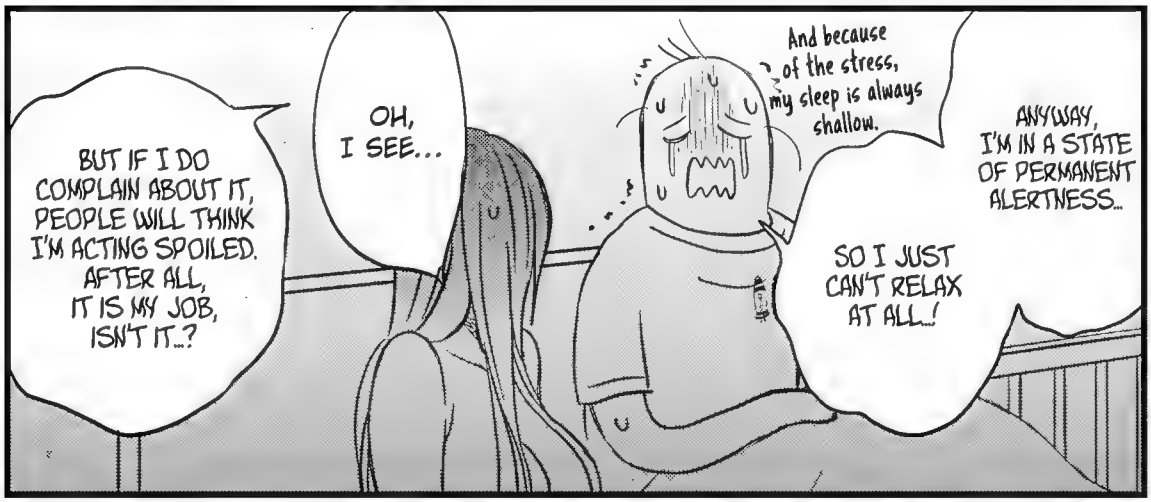

IF YOU SAY THAT YOU'RE FINE...
I'LL THINK, "REALLY? I'M GLAD, THEN."
I'M NOT GOOD AT INTERPRETING THE INTENTIONS BEHIND THE WORDS. I CAN ONLY UNDERSTAND THINGS LITERALLY.

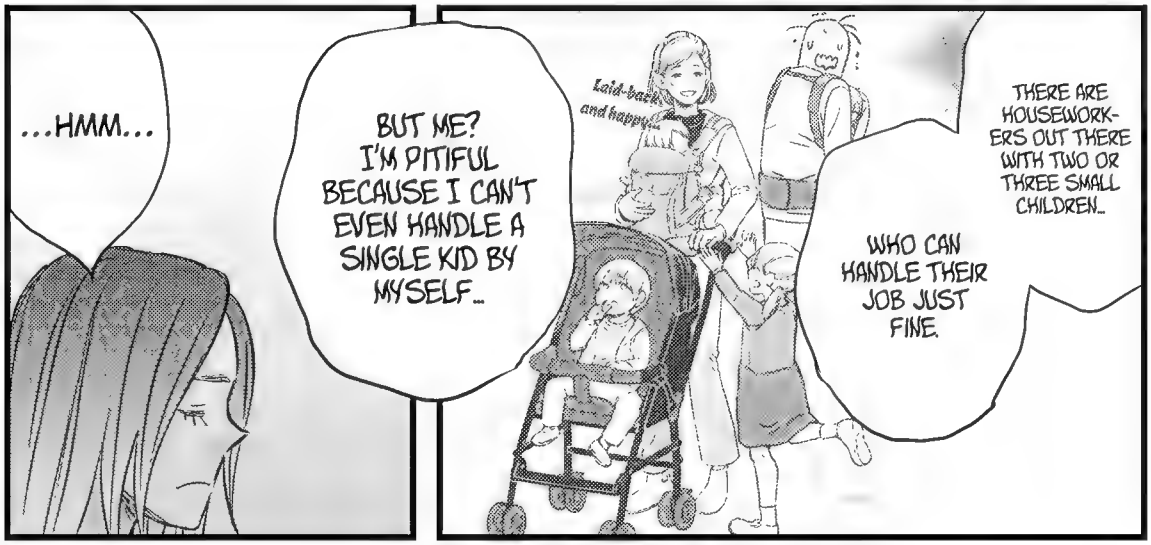
IF YOU'RE IN PAIN, DON'T HIDE IT. INSTEAD, SAY IT. NEVER EVER OVERDO IT.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO OVERWORK YOURSELF PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY.
YOU MAY THINK YOU NEED TO DO IT FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR FAMILY, BUT...
NEITHER JUN NOR I WANT YOU TO DO THAT.

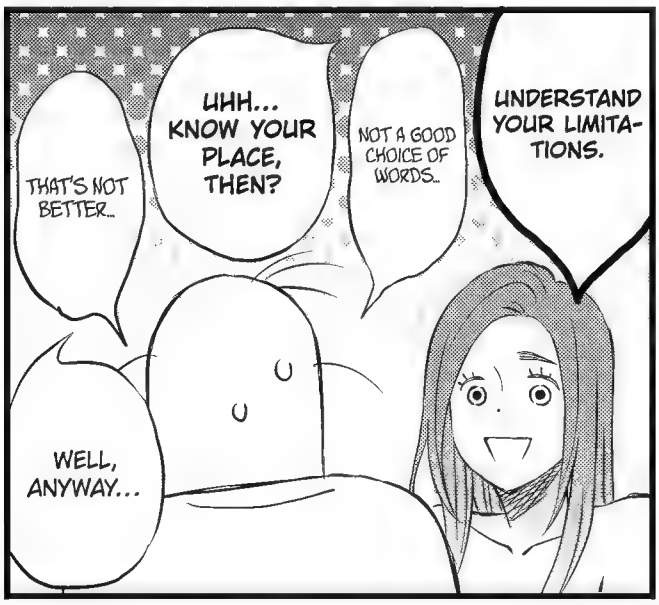

SO I ASK YOU AGAIN.
ARE YOU REALLY OKAY?
...NGH!


THE TRUTH IS...

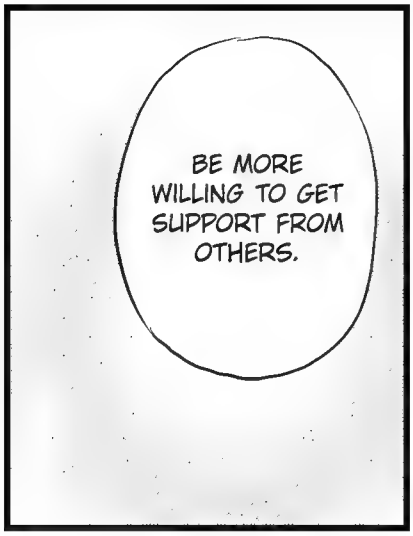

A spelunker?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
LATELY, I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN LIVING LIKE A SPELUNKER FIGHTING FOR DEAR LIFE...
I FEEL LIKE IF I MAKE ONE SMALL MISTAKE, SHE'LL DIE.
I CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF YOU AT ANY POINT...
SO YOU'RE NOT OKAY AT ALL...
I'M ABOUT TO REACH MY LIMIIIIIT!

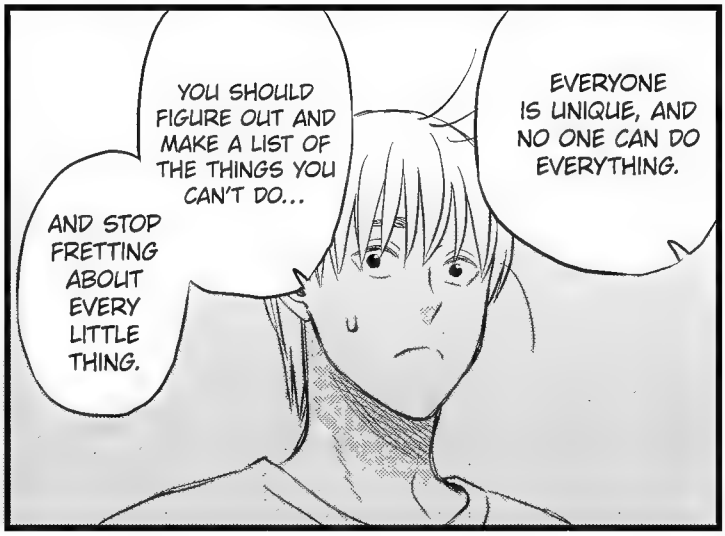

BUT IF I DO COMPLAIN ABOUT IT, PEOPLE WILL THINK I'M ACTING SPOILED. AFTER ALL, IT IS MY JOB, ISN'T IT...?
OH, I SEE...
And because of the stress, my sleep is always shallow.
ANYWAY, I'M IN A STATE OF PERMANENT ALERTNESS...
SO I JUST CAN'T RELAX AT ALL...!


...HMM...
BUT ME? I'M PITIFUL BECAUSE I CAN'T EVEN HANDLE A SINGLE KID BY MYSELF...
Laid-back and happy...
THERE ARE HOUSEWORKERS OUT THERE WITH TWO OR THREE SMALL CHILDREN...
WHO CAN HANDLE THEIR JOB JUST FINE.

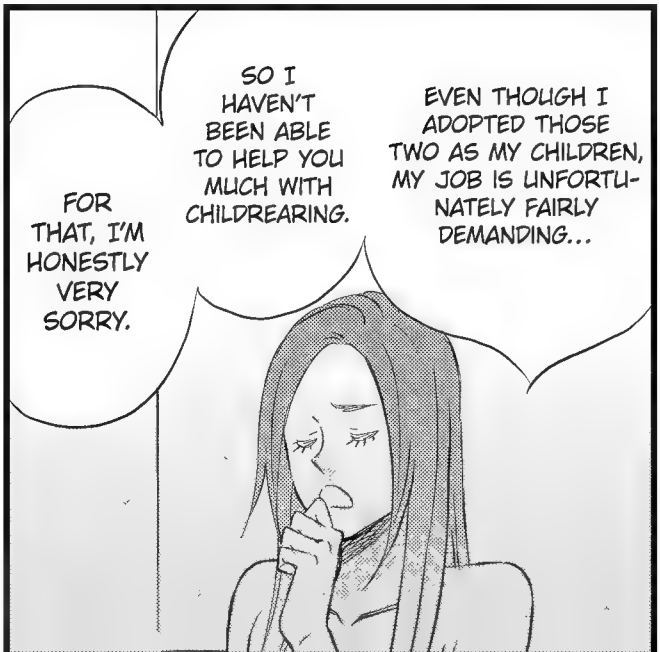

UNDERSTAND YOUR LIMITATIONS.
NOT A GOOD CHOICE OF WORDS...
UHH... KNOW YOUR PLACE, THEN?
THAT'S NOT BETTER...
WELL, ANYWAY...

IT'S FINE TO HAVE A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF.
AI-SAN...
SHIROU-KUN, YOU HAVE TO...


BE MORE WILLING TO GET SUPPORT FROM OTHERS.

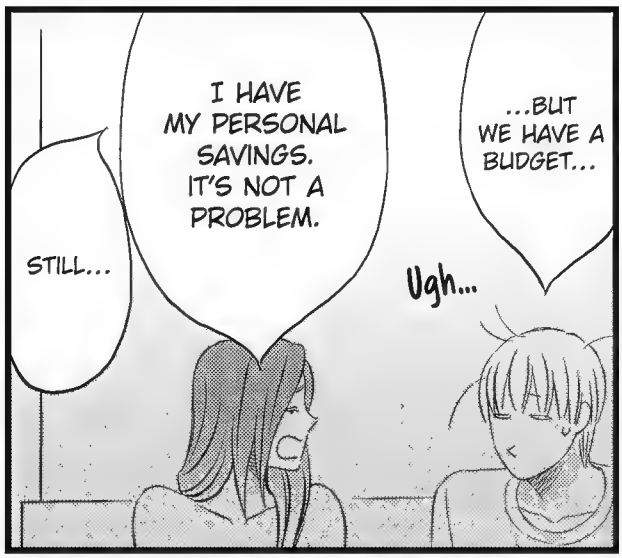

EVERYONE IS UNIQUE, AND NO ONE CAN DO EVERYTHING.
YOU SHOULD FIGURE OUT AND MAKE A LIST OF THE THINGS YOU CAN'T DO...
AND STOP FRETTING ABOUT EVERY LITTLE THING.

BUT, EVEN IF I CAN'T SUPPORT YOU DIRECTLY, I WANT TO DO WHATEVER I CAN TO HELP YOU INDIRECTLY.
INDIRECTLY ...?
MY POINT IS...

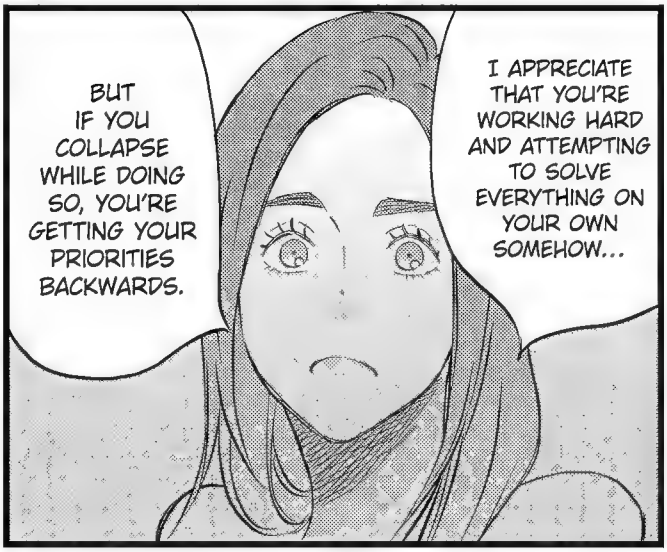

EVEN THOUGH I ADOPTED THOSE TWO AS MY CHILDREN, MY JOB IS UNFORTUNATELY FAIRLY DEMANDING...
SO I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO HELP YOU MUCH WITH CHILDREARING.
FOR THAT, I'M HONESTLY VERY SORRY.

MONEY!
IF YOU NEED MONEY, I'LL GIVE YOU AS MUCH AS YOU WANT.
JUST ASK!

THERE ARE A FEW ISSUES THAT MONEY CAN SOLVE WHEN IT COMES TO CHILDCARE AND HOUSEWORK.
WHETHER YOU NEED A BABYSITTER OR A HOUSE-KEEPER...

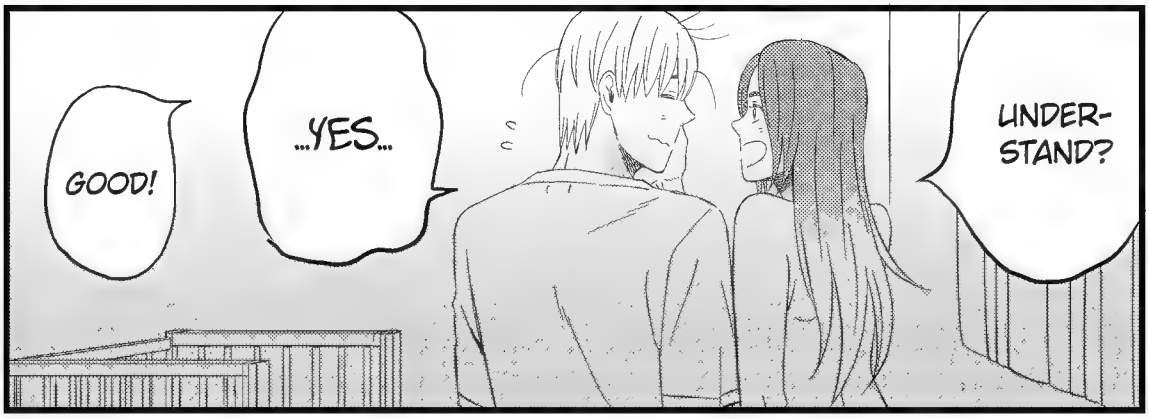

STILL...
I HAVE MY PERSONAL SAVINGS. IT'S NOT A PROBLEM.
...BUT WE HAVE A BUDGET...
Ugh...

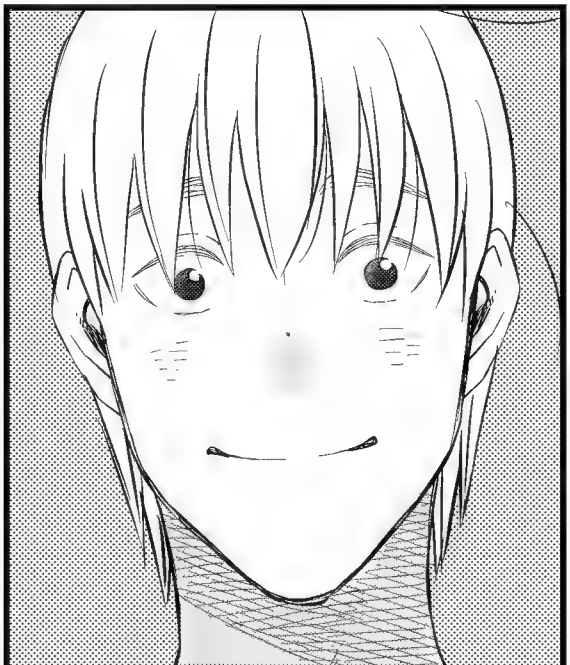
BE MORE OPEN TO RELYING ON OTHER PEOPLE.
THINK MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO YOURSELF.
...

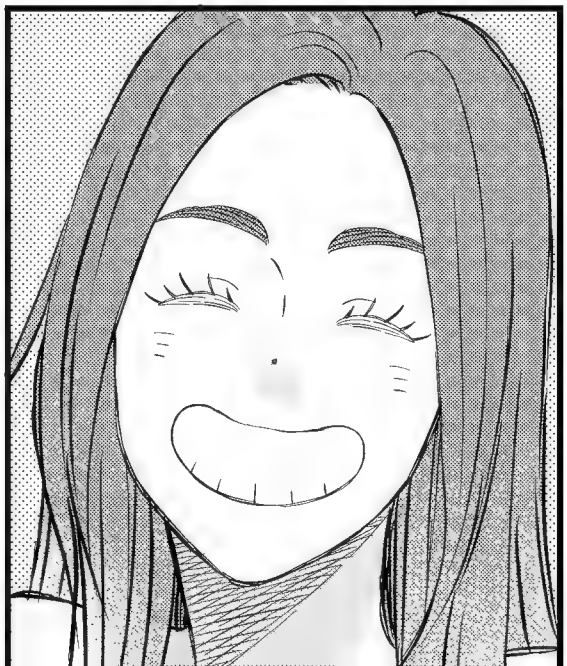

BUT IF YOU COLLAPSE WHILE DOING SO, YOU'RE GETTING YOUR PRIORITIES BACKWARDS.
I APPRECIATE THAT YOU'RE WORKING HARD AND ATTEMPTING TO SOLVE EVERYTHING ON YOUR OWN SOMEHOW...

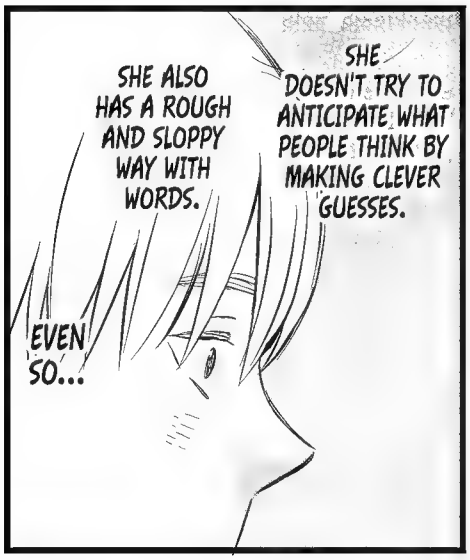
WHEN YOU'RE IN TROUBLE, YOU SHOULD TURN TO OTHERS FOR HELP.
IT'S SIMPLE.

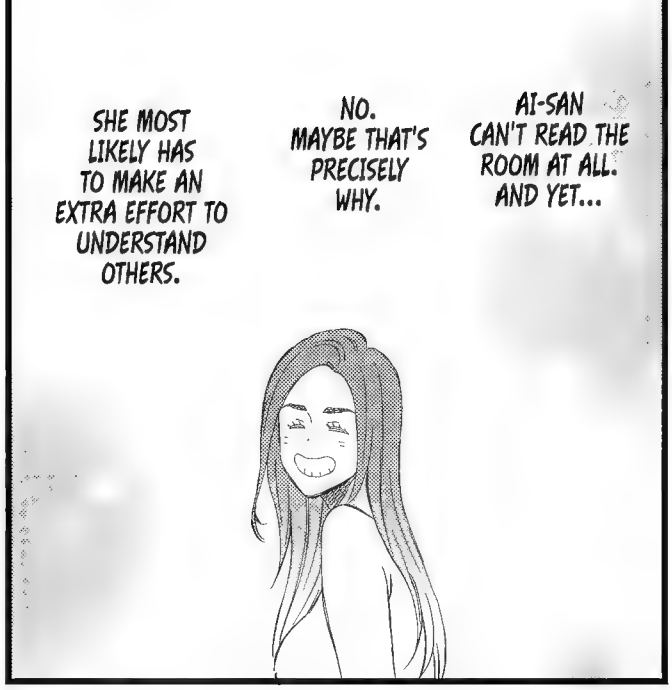
THIS IS MY JOB, THOUGH. YOU SURE THAT'S OKAY?
IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU WORK ON IT FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME. IT'S THE SAME FOR EVERYONE.

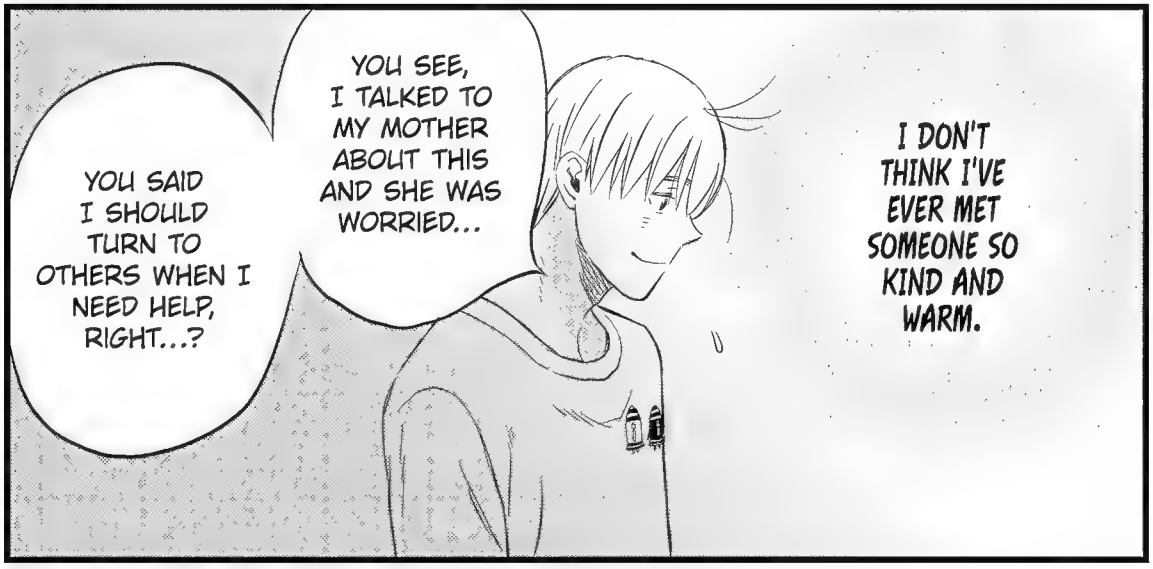

UNDER-STAND?
...YES...
GOOD!

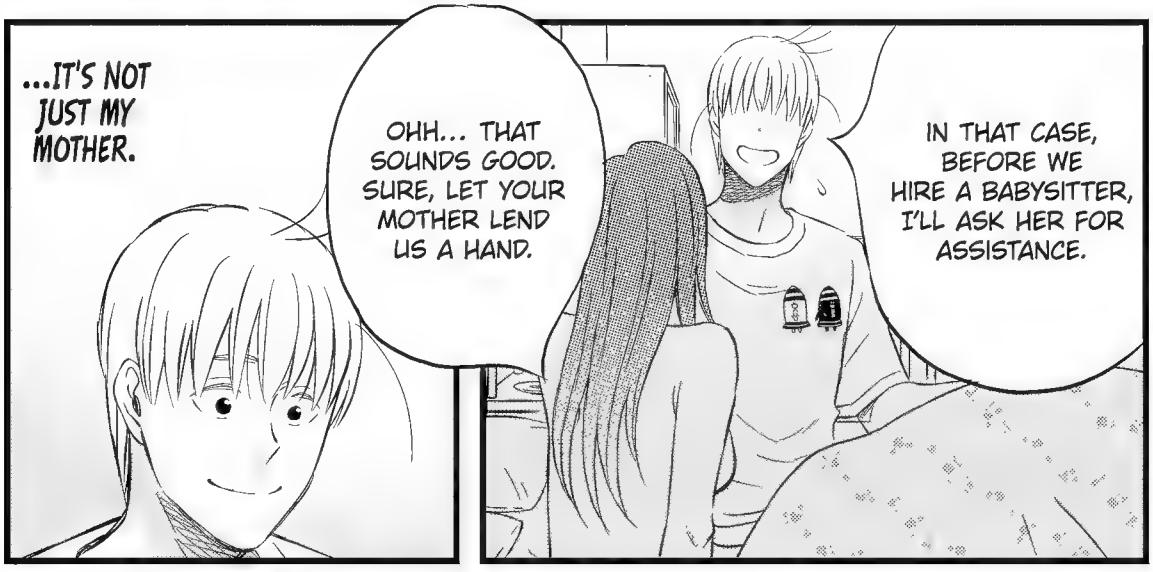


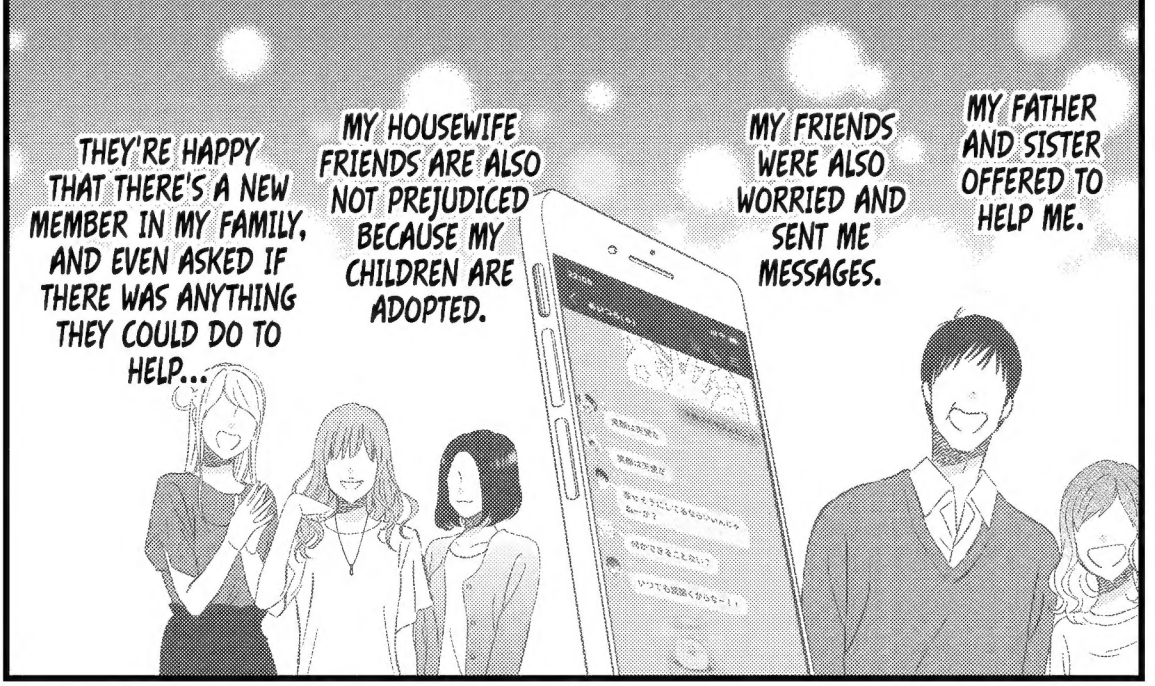



SHE ALSO HAS A ROUGH AND SLOPPY WAY WITH WORDS.
SHE DOESN'T TRY TO ANTICIPATE WHAT PEOPLE THINK BY MAKING CLEVER GUESSES.
EVEN SO...

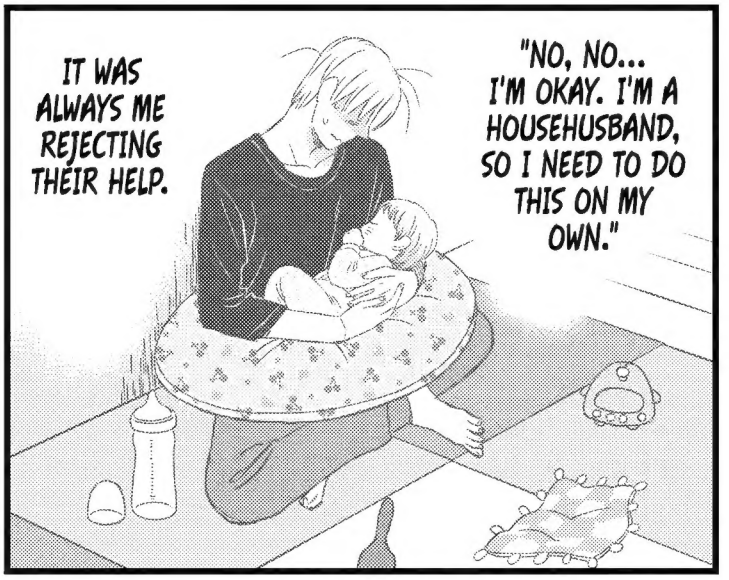

SHE MOST LIKELY HAS TO MAKE AN EXTRA EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS.
NO. MAYBE THAT'S PRECISELY WHY.
AI-SAN CAN'T READ THE ROOM AT ALL. AND YET...

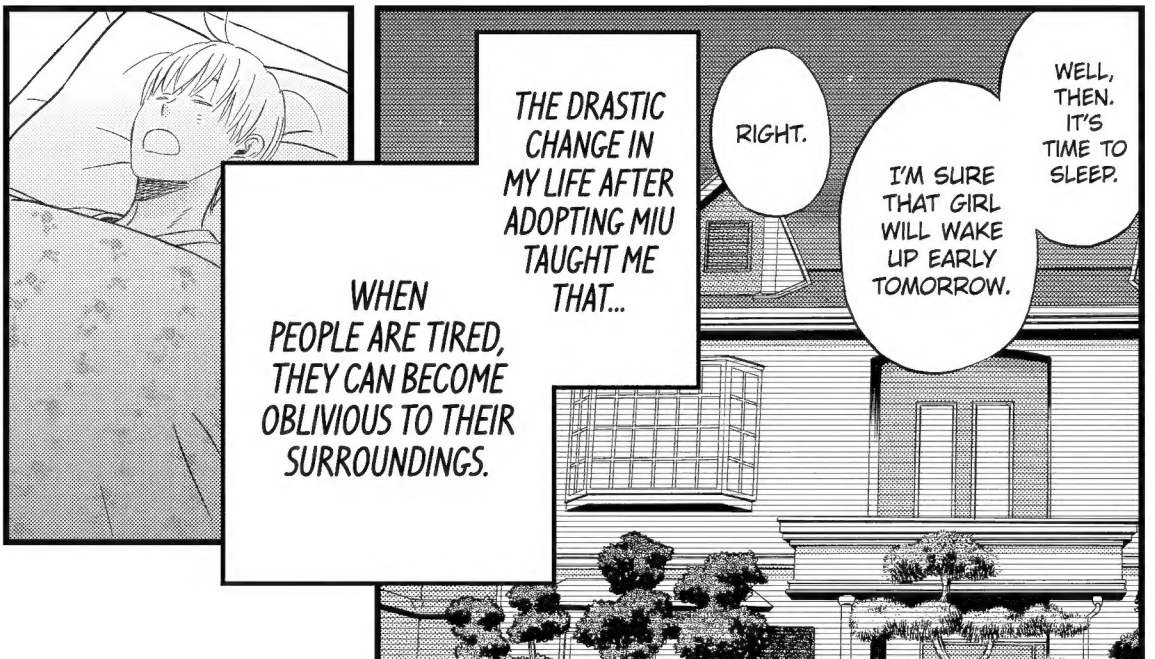

YOU SAID I SHOULD TURN TO OTHERS WHEN I NEED HELP, RIGHT...?
YOU SEE, I TALKED TO MY MOTHER ABOUT THIS AND SHE WAS WORRIED...
I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER MET SOMEONE SO KIND AND WARM.


...IT'S NOT JUST MY MOTHER.
OHH... THAT SOUNDS GOOD. SURE, LET YOUR MOTHER LEND US A HAND.
IN THAT CASE, BEFORE WE HIRE A BABYSITTER, I'LL ASK HER FOR ASSISTANCE.

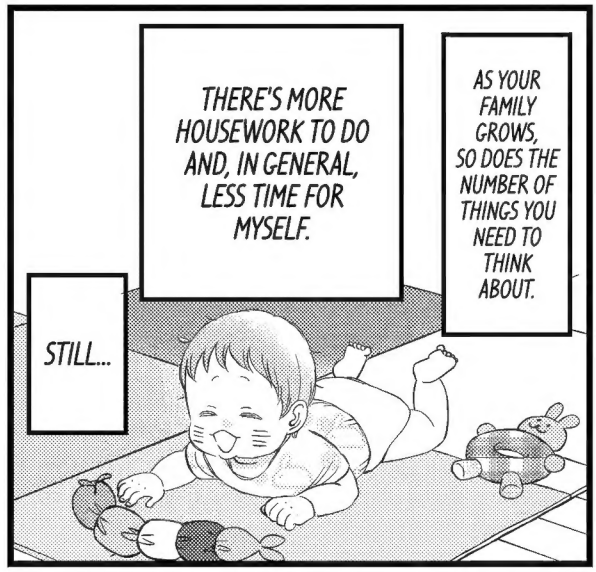

THEY'RE HAPPY THAT THERE'S A NEW MEMBER IN MY FAMILY, AND EVEN ASKED IF THERE WAS ANYTHING THEY COULD DO TO HELP...
MY HOUSEWIFE FRIENDS ARE ALSO NOT PREJUDICED BECAUSE MY CHILDREN ARE ADOPTED.
MY FRIENDS WERE ALSO WORRIED AND SENT ME MESSAGES.
MY FATHER AND SISTER OFFERED TO HELP ME.

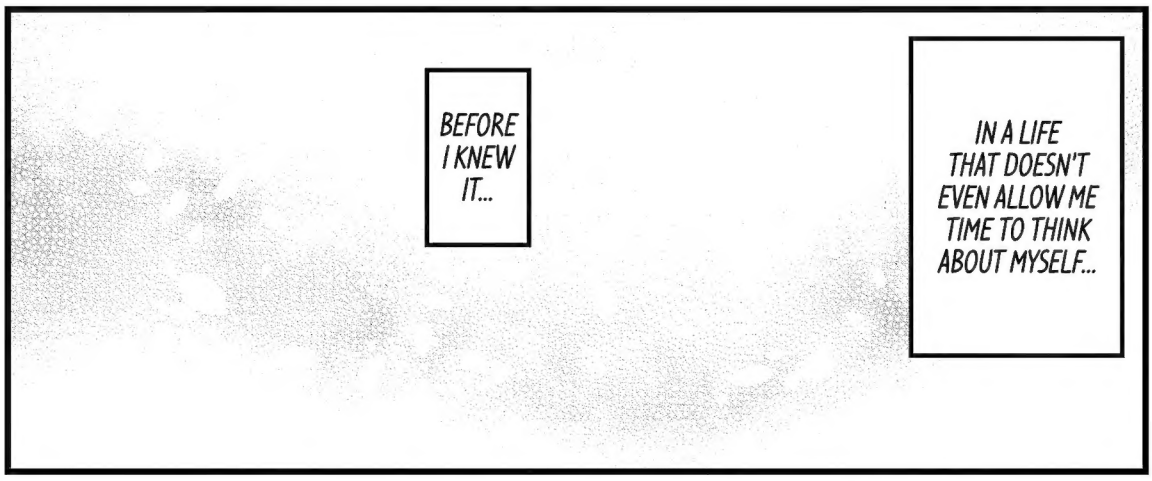
EVEN THOUGH SO MANY PEOPLE STRETCHED OUT THEIR HANDS TO ME...

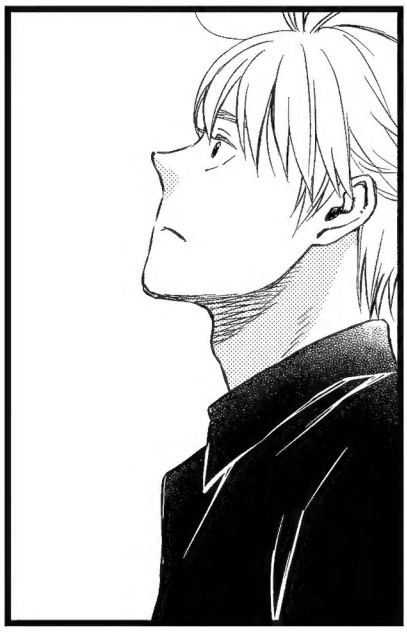

IT WAS ALWAYS ME REJECTING THEIR HELP.
"NO, NO... I'M OKAY. I'M A HOUSEHUSBAND, SO I NEED TO DO THIS ON MY OWN."


THE DRASTIC CHANGE IN MY LIFE AFTER ADOPTING MIU TAUGHT ME THAT...
WHEN PEOPLE ARE TIRED, THEY CAN BECOME OBLIVIOUS TO THEIR SURROUNDINGS.
RIGHT.
I'M SURE THAT GIRL WILL WAKE UP EARLY TOMORROW.
WELL, THEN. IT'S TIME TO SLEEP.

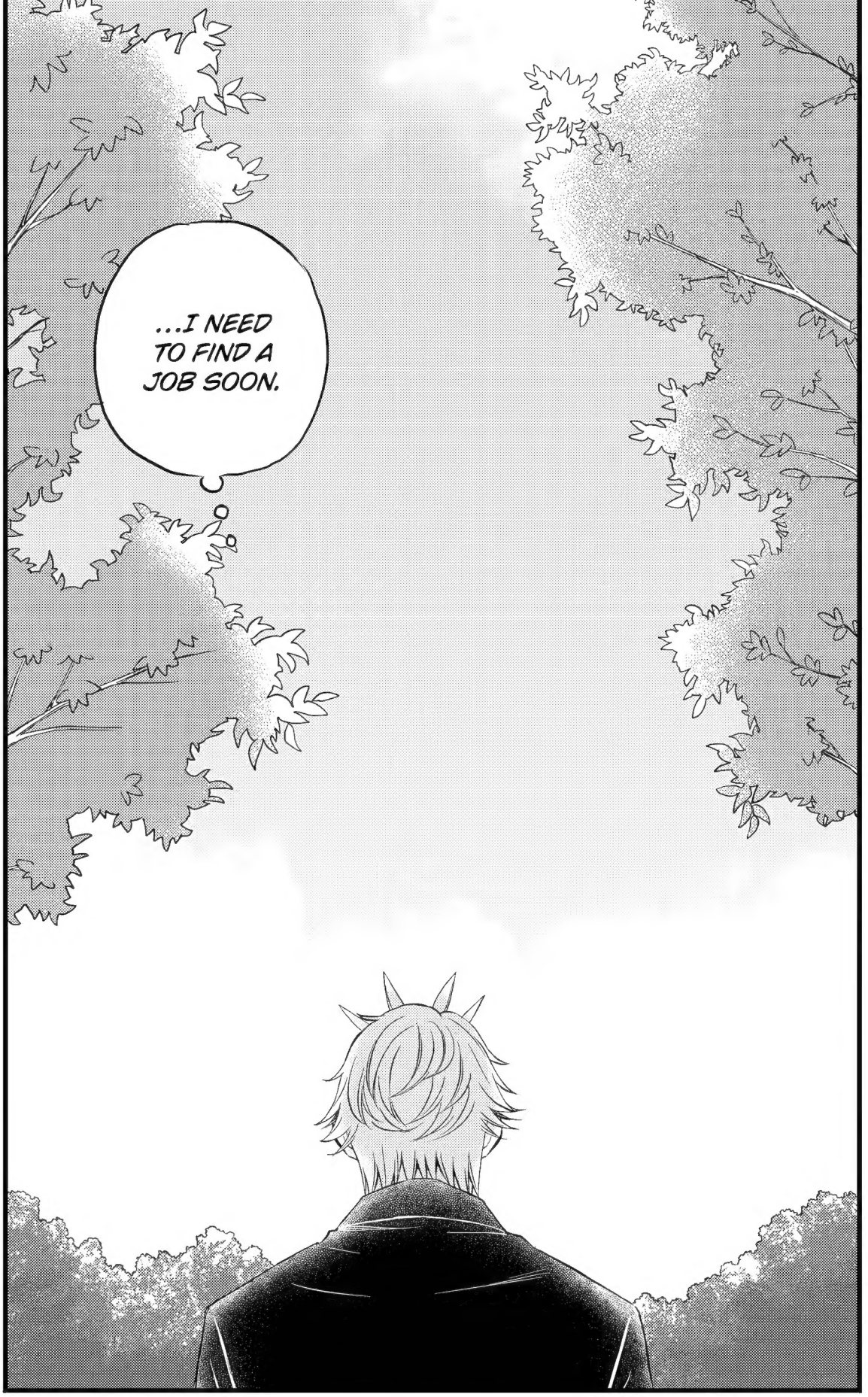
IN THE MIDST OF A HECTIC LIFE WHERE I'M FORTUNATE TO HAVE THE HELP OF SO MANY PEOPLE...


AS YOUR FAMILY GROWS, SO DOES THE NUMBER OF THINGS YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT.
THERE'S MORE HOUSEWORK TO DO AND, IN GENERAL, LESS TIME FOR MYSELF.
STILL...


IN A LIFE THAT DOESN'T EVEN ALLOW ME TIME TO THINK ABOUT MYSELF...
BEFORE I KNEW IT...



DEEP DOWN, IT FELT LIKE A NEW VERSION OF MYSELF WAS BORN.


...I NEED TO FIND A JOB SOON.